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Award Number: W81XWH-06-1-0334

TITLE: BARRIERS TO BREAST CANCER SCREENING AMONG LATINAS IN  
THE U.S.-MEXICO BORDER REGION

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REPORT DATE: May 2007

TYPE OF REPORT: Annual

PREPARED FOR: U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command  
Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012

DISTRIBUTION STATEMENT: Approved for Public Release;  
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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
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1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 01-05-2007		2. REPORT TYPE Annual		3. DATES COVERED (From - To) 01 May 06 – 30 Apr 07	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE BARRIERS TO BREAST CANCER SCREENING AMONG LATINAS IN THE U.S.- MEXICO BORDER REGION				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER W81XWH-06-1-0334	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Jose A. Pagan, Ph.D.  E-Mail: <a href="mailto:jpagan@utpa.edu">jpagan@utpa.edu</a>				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES)  The University of Texas-Pan American Edinburgh TX 78541-2999				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army Medical Research and Materiel Command Fort Detrick, Maryland 21702-5012				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Approved for Public Release; Distribution Unlimited					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT: The purpose of this project is to establish a research and training collaborative partnership between the Institute for Population Health Policy (IPHP) at the University of Texas-Pan American and the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics (LDI) at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). Our objectives and scope are: to develop a competitive and successful breast cancer research program that focuses in cancer control and population sciences at UTPA; to develop and complete a research project on barriers to breast cancer screening among Latinas in the U.S.-Mexico border region; to develop the research infrastructure that will enable UTPA investigators to submit competitive breast cancer research proposals. The key accomplishments during the first year of the project are: the development of survey instrument for mammography screening practices; completion of a manuscript for peer review with coauthors from UTPA and Penn; and the development of a summer research training experience at Penn for UTPA faculty members.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Breast cancer screening; Latinas					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT	18. NUMBER OF PAGES	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT	b. ABSTRACT	c. THIS PAGE			USAMRMC
U	U	U	UU	6	19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

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## INTRODUCTION

The subject/purpose of this project is to establish a research and training collaborative partnership between the Institute for Population Health Policy (IPHP) at the University of Texas-Pan American—a Minority Institution—and the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics (LDI) at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn). The UTPA-Penn breast cancer research/training partnership focuses on understanding and ameliorating disparities in breast cancer screening among Latinas in the U.S.-Mexico border region. Our objectives and scope are (1) to develop a competitive and successful breast cancer research program that focuses in cancer control and population sciences at UTPA; (2) to develop and complete a research project on barriers to breast cancer screening among Latinas in the U.S.-Mexico border region; (3) to develop the research infrastructure that will enable UTPA investigators to submit competitive breast cancer research proposals.

## BODY

The Statement of Work for the project includes the following three tasks:

- (1) Develop a competitive and successful breast cancer research program that focuses in cancer control and population sciences at UTPA (Years 1 and 2)
- (2) Develop and complete a research project on barriers to breast cancer screening among Latinas in the U.S.-Mexico border region (Years 3 and 4)
- (3) Develop the research infrastructure that will enable UTPA investigators to submit competitive breast cancer research proposals (Year 4)

We have been able to accomplish our set goals and objectives during the first year of the project. Our first task for years 1 and 2 involve the development of a competitive and successful breast cancer research program that focuses in cancer control and population sciences at UTPA. More specifically, we developed and implemented a breast cancer research training program for UTPA faculty that included interaction with Penn faculty involved in this project as well as formal courses during the 2006 summer at Penn.

Drs. Brown, Hinojosa and Pagán took summer courses at Penn in 2006. The courses centered on cancer research lectures and seminars within the clinical research summer program at Penn. Drs. Brown, Hinojosa and Pagán were able to take courses on Database Management, Fundamentals of Biostatistics, Introduction to Epidemiologic Research Methods, and Clinical Trials and Translational Research. Dr. Bastida was unable to participate in the program due to a previous research-related commitment in South Africa.

Dr. Angela DeMichele (Co-Investigator in this project) is the Director of the Clinical/Translational Research Training Program in the Division of Hematology/Oncology and she taught one of the courses (Clinical Trials and Translational Research) and assisted UTPA faculty during the summer experience at Penn. The summer program allowed for opportunities for UTPA investigators to meet face-to-face with Penn investigators and to discuss the research hypotheses, survey design, IRB and other issues related to the research project on border breast cancer screening practices.

Drs. Asch, Armstrong and Guerra have been guiding the research project and have served as mentors and research collaborators to UTPA faculty members. We conducted a meeting at Penn in July 2006 to discuss the structure of the research project on breast cancer screening in the border region (Drs. Asch, Armstrong, Guerra, Pagán, Hinojosa and Brown participated). At the invitation of Dr. Asch, Dr. Pagán presented a seminar in February 2007 at Penn for the Robert Wood Johnson Health & Society Scholars Program. Dr. Pagán discussed his research agenda in health care economics and gave RWJF Health & Society Scholars a general perspective of the collaborative projects between UTPA and Penn, including the HBCU/MI Partnership Training Award.

Tasks 2 and 3 of the Statement of Work involve the development and completion of a research project on barriers to breast cancer screening among Latinas in the U.S.-Mexico border region (years 3 and 4) and the development of a research infrastructure at UTPA that will enable investigators to submit competitive breast cancer research proposals (year 4). We have already made some progress in these tasks by developing a survey instrument (and informed consent form) to identify sociodemographic correlates of underutilization of mammography screening among Latinas in the U.S.-Mexico border region. We are in the process of receiving IRB approval to conduct this study, which includes the recruitment of 877 study participants based on the sample design and sample of the Border Epidemiological Study on Aging. All the IRB paperwork has been submitted both to the UTPA IRB for expedited review and to the Department of Defense for pre-review.

Perhaps the best evidence that this collaborative partnership between UTPA and Penn is being very successful includes the submission in 2007 of a manuscript on breast cancer screening and health insurance coverage. This paper is under review in *Medical Care* and includes two faculty members from UTPA (Pagán and Brown) and three from Penn (Asch, Armstrong and Guerra) that are part of this HBCU/MI Partnership Training Award. Here is the abstract:

“Community uninsurance and mammography screening rates among insured and uninsured women” (J.A. Pagán, D.A. Asch, C.J. Brown, C.E. Guerra, and K.A. Armstrong)

### ***Abstract***

**Context.** Although the individual effects of health insurance coverage are well established, effects of the community level of uninsurance have received less attention. If low levels of health insurance coverage in a community create financial stress on local health care systems, they may be associated with inadequate health care for both insured and uninsured individuals.

**Objective.** To evaluate whether the proportion of the local population without health insurance coverage is related to whether adult women undergo mammography screening within the past year.

**Design and Setting.** 2000-2001 Community Tracking Study Household Survey, a national study developed to track changes the local health care systems of 60 U.S. communities and representative of households in the contiguous 48 states (59,725 participants).

**Participants.** Women 40 to 69 years of age who participated in the 2000-2001 Community Tracking Study Household Survey (12,595 participants).

**Main Outcome Measure.** Whether or not the respondent had a mammogram within the past year.

**Results.** Regardless of their own insurance coverage, women ages 40 to 69 were less likely to report that they had a mammogram within the last year if they resided in communities with a relatively high uninsurance rate, after adjusting for other individual and community-level variables that could be associated with mammography screening. A 10 percentage-point decrease in the proportion of the local insured population is associated with an 18.3 percent decrease in the likelihood that a woman ages 40-69 will undergo mammography screening within a year.

**Conclusions.** Women living in communities with high uninsurance are substantially less likely to undergo mammography, whether or not they have health insurance coverage themselves. These results are consistent with the view that the negative impact of uninsurance extends to everyone in the community regardless of individual health insurance status.

### **KEY RESEARCH ACCOMPLISHMENTS**

- Development of survey instrument and consent form for a mammography screening survey of Latinas in the US/Mexico border region.
- Completion and submission of a manuscript for peer review with coauthors from UTPA and Penn (Community uninsurance and mammography screening rates among insured and uninsured women).
- Summer research training experience at Penn for three UTPA faculty members.
- Invitation to present at a research seminar at the Robert Wood Johnson Health & Society Scholars Program at Penn for the UTPA PI.
- Submission of a \$1.4 million research proposal by UTPA to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality (M-RISP: Minority-Research Infrastructure Support Program) in February 2007. Penn is the partnering institution.

### **REPORTABLE OUTCOMES**

#### ***Manuscript***

Community uninsurance and mammography screening rates among insured and uninsured women (J.A. Pagán, D.A. Asch, C.J. Brown, C.E. Guerra, and K.A. Armstrong) (under review in *Medical Care*)

#### ***Grant application (to the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality)***

#### **UTPA Health Services Research Initiative**

The University of Texas-Pan American (UTPA) is the second largest Hispanic Serving Institution in the U.S. and it educates more Mexican American students than any other institution of higher education in the country. UTPA serves the educational needs of one of the poorest regions in the U.S.—the U.S.-Mexico border communities located in the Rio Grande Valley of South Texas. According to The University of Texas-Pan American Compact with the University of Texas System, the highest priority long-term initiative of UTPA for the next ten years is to become the doctoral research university of South Texas. In order to achieve this objective, UTPA is interested in developing new graduate degree programs and in increasing the research capacity and productivity of its faculty, especially in areas of regional strategic significance such as health services research. This AHRQ M-RISP application seeks to develop a Health Services Research (HSR) Initiative within the UTPA Institute for Population Health Policy (IPHP) to strengthen the research environment at UTPA and to enhance the competitiveness of faculty members in health services research. The research activities to be undertaken under the HSR Initiative primarily focus on health disparities and health care utilization/access for priority populations—more specifically, low-income minority populations in the U.S.-Mexico border and the uninsured. The HSR Initiative also takes advantage of an ongoing collaborative partnership between the IPHP and the Leonard Davis Institute (LDI) of Health

Economics at the University of Pennsylvania. The LDI will provide technical expertise, mentoring and support to the proposed HSR Initiative. The Specific Aims of this M-RISP application are: (1) to develop a Health Services Research Initiative at UTPA, (2) to enhance the capacity of individual faculty members to undertake health services research, with a focus on research in low-income minority populations and the uninsured, and (3) to develop and foster research dedicated to reducing health and health care access disparities among Latino populations, particularly in the U.S.-Mexico border region. The HSR Initiative will support four individual investigator research projects which deal with community uninsurance and health care access, the use of health care services in the U.S.-Mexico border region, severe weather and health care use by low-income and uninsured vulnerable populations, and the cost-effectiveness and net-benefits of school-based health promotion programs. The proposed HSR Initiative will also actively promote the development of research projects by junior faculty and graduate students which focus on the U.S. Latino population and are consistent with the goals and objectives of both AHRQ and the UTPA-IPHP HSR Initiative.

## **CONCLUSION**

The development of a research and training collaborative partnership between the Institute for Population Health Policy (IPHP) at the University of Texas-Pan American and the Leonard Davis Institute of Health Economics (LDI) at the University of Pennsylvania (Penn) has been very successful during the first year of this project. The partnership has allowed UTPA researchers to receive research training at Penn, to conduct research with Penn investigators, and to develop a survey instrument and consent form that is the basis of a research study that will look at mammography screening practices among Latinas in US/Mexico border communities. We are in the process of developing a successful breast cancer research program and we are getting closer to developing the research infrastructure that will enable UTPA investigators to submit competitive breast cancer research proposals.

## **REFERENCES**

NA

## **APPENDICES**

None